

2003

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
RELEASE AS SANITIZED

## Office Memorandum

~~SECRET~~

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Mr. Esterline

DATE: 12 May 1954

FROM : CWH

SUBJECT:

Two copies of attached memo were sent to the Division by [ ]  
[ ] We are keeping one in Branch III and the attached is  
either for your retention or to send to LINCOLN. [ ] made the  
following remark: "This is a record copy of [ ] and my  
conversation last week with Asst. Secretary Hollana. I've attached  
a few extra copies on the off chance you choose to send one to  
LINCOLN. [ ] contributed much of the data that  
went into this."

~~Copy to [ ]~~  
File~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

7 May 1954

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Participants: Mr. Holland (Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau  
of Inter-American Affairs)

[ ]

Mr. Leddy (State/ARA)

Date : 5 May 1954

Subject : Summary of Currently Available Information on the Recent  
Attack on President Somoza of Nicaragua

1. At Mr. Holland's request [ ] gave a brief summary of the incident, as outlined in Annex 1 of this memorandum.

2. Mr. Holland then requested a background statement on the Caribbean Legion. [ ] outlined the history and objectives of the movement, and its relation to Central American nations and political figures. She pointed out that the Legion was at one time based on Guatemalan soil and received material assistance from the Guatemalan government under President Arevalo with the collaboration of Col. Jacobo Arbenz as Minister of Defense. She mentioned that one of the officers of the Legion, Col. Francisco Morazan, Honduran Communist, was one of the assassins of Col. Francisco Arana of Guatemala, political rival to Arbenz. Since Arbenz' nomination as President the Colonel has remained a member of Arbenz' household, as a private secretary and bodyguard.

3. She reviewed the part taken by the Legion in the 1948 Costa Rican revolution, which resulted in President Jose Figueres' initial political success, and mentioned the hold on Figueres this circumstance has given the remnants of the Legion which remain in Costa Rica. She characterized President Figueres as no longer closely linked to these individuals but always disposed to be tolerant toward them, if not actually giving them material aid, because of his political debt to them, because of his friendship for Romulo Betancourt, and because of his lasting dislike for General Somoza of Nicaragua and other dictators of the Caribbean area whom the Legion originally set out to depose.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

4. Mr. Holland then requested a statement from [ ] on the evidence implicating the Guatemalan and Costa Rican governments in the recent attack on General Somoza.

5. [ ] stated that the total information now available supports the following conclusions:

a. The attack on Somoza's life was a genuine attempt made by a small group of Nicaraguan exiles, mostly former members of the Caribbean Legion, including acquisition of arms, for this attempt (plus approximately 100 Nicaraguans recruited in Nicaragua by General Chamorro).

b. The conspirators were tolerated in Costa Rica but were not demonstrably supported by the Costa Rican Government. Their presence in Costa Rica was tolerated by President Figueres, who apparently had knowledge of their plans. The Nicaraguan Ambassador in Costa Rica was well informed regarding the activities of the Nicaraguan exiles in that country, and reported his information to the Costa Rican Government. Nothing was done by the Costa Rican Government to prevent the departure of this group for the attack on Nicaragua.

c. The Guatemalan Government was not demonstrably involved in the preparation or execution of the plan.

d. The fact that the only Nicaraguan officer in active service (Air Force Lieutenant Duarte) who participated in the action took asylum in the Guatemalan Embassy is a suspicious incident. The question of his motive in doing so is not yet answered.

e. President Somoza has inflated the importance and scope of the conspiracy in press and public statements. He has charged that the governments of Costa Rica and Guatemala were involved in the plot or gave aid and comfort to the conspirators. He has produced certain documentary evidence to support these charges. He is still developing the case.

6. Mr. Holland then indicated that his principal concern was to obtain an accurate evaluation of the quantity, nature and reliability of the

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

factual evidence available regarding Costa Rican or Guatemalan involvement. [ ] stated that one document mentioning President Arbenz and implying ~~no~~ possible implication is reported to exist, but that she had not been able to see it because it is being held at present for a special security check. She said she understood that Mr. Ray Leddy had a copy of the document. Mr. Holland telephoned Mr. Leddy and asked him to bring in the pertinent documents in his possession.

7. It was found that Reel No. 7 also was missing from Mr. Leddy's set of photographic copies of the documentary evidence supplied by President Somoza, for the same security reason.

8. Mr. Leddy remained and participated in the general discussion of the evidence which followed. Mr. Holland said he thought the evidence regarding Figueres' involvement was "intuitive" rather than factual. [ ] said they thought there was positive evidence showing that the Nicaraguan Ambassador had informed Figueres and the Costa Rican Government of the activities of the conspirators, that Figueres had made but a slight gesture to curb these activities, and that he admitted that in tolerating the presence of the Nicaraguan exiles and ex-Caribbean Legionnaires he had been "too trusting". Mr. Leddy added that according to one report Figueres had gone even farther in "virtually admitting" complicity to Ambassador Hill. [ ] said she had not seen this report. Mr. Holland said he would ask the Ambassador to report the circumstances of this "admission."

9. Mr. Holland conceded, apart from the question of any actual admission of complicity by President Figueres, that there seemed to be considerable evidence showing that a conspiratorial attack against a neighboring friendly country had been mounted in Costa Rica, that the Costa Rican government had been warned that this action was being prepared, and had failed to take any positive action to restrain the attempt.

10. Mr. Leddy said that additional circumstantial evidence regarding Figueres' complicity was given in Ambassador Hill's reports of Figueres' seeming "terror" that the extent of his connection with the conspiratorial group would be revealed. Mr. Leddy explained that Figueres' political prestige had been declining that, <sup>and</sup> proof of his involvement might result in an internal Costa Rica political crisis.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

5 May 1954

ANNEX 1

1. The main incidents of the assassination attempt made on 3 April 1954 were as follows:

A group of 25 men, mostly former members of the Caribbean Legion and mostly Nicaraguans, with one Cuban and one Guatemalan among them, entered Nicaragua at a point near Granada from Costa Rica. They carried with them a miscellaneous collection of rifles, pistols, submachine guns, ammunition and grenades.

They were aided in entering Nicaragua by Humberto Chamorro and other members of the Chamorro family, ~~and other members of the Chamorro family~~, and were promised support by General Emiliano Chamorro, 80-year-old head of the recognized Somoza opposition in Nicaragua. (A mutual agreement pact exists between Somoza and General Chamorro, whereby Chamorro's followers enjoy 40% representation in the Legislature and other benefits as an official opposition). General Chamorro had been in communication with the Nicaraguan exiles in Costa Rica for six or eight months, encouraging them in their plans for an attack on Nicaragua and supplying funds with which to purchase arms in Costa Rica.

General Chamorro's agents in these dealings was Enrique Solorzano Thompson, also Humberto Chamorro.

Arrangements were made by General Chamorro for the conspirators to enter a house about 6 miles outside of Managua, where he was to send the 200 promised supporters to join them. He failed to deliver more than 100, who arrived late and in irregular movements. A staff meeting was held during the afternoon of 3 April and in view of developments, the original plan for assaulting the Presidential Palace was changed to a plan to ambush and assassinate or capture President Somoza that same night when he emerged from a reception being held at the American Embassy. This affair was in honor of US General Whitlock and the signing of the bilateral military agreement between the US and Nicaragua.

Leaders of Conservative Party, Liberal Independents and Union Nacional de Accion Popular reportedly were standing by foreword of the assassination when they would go into the streets with loudspeaker trucks to arouse the populace.

~~SECRET~~

*Annex #1*

~~SECRET~~

The attempt failed. The principal leaders and most of the total group of ex-Caribbean Legionnaires who came from Costa Rica were killed or captured and subsequently killed at Somoza's orders. One Nicaraguan Lieutenant of the Guardia Civil, Guillermo Duarte, took asylum in the Guatemalan Embassy. Humberto Chamorro supplied a confession of his part in the affair after remaining nine days in hiding. General Chamorro went into hiding on the night of 3 April before the ambush occurred. Somoza has since announced that he will respect General Chamorro's Senatorial immunity and allow him to leave the country.

Guillermo Duarte is accused by Somoza of criminal action for abandoning his military post and absconding with funds of the Nicaraguan National Guard. Somoza states that he will make formal demand on Guatemala for surrender of Duarte and if it is refused, will break diplomatic relations.

2. Most of the evidence bearing on this entire incident, from the early rumors circulating in Costa Rica as early as December, 1953, down to the recent reports, has originated from sources linked with Somoza. The Costa Rican and Guatemalan governments have been in the position of making defensive denials. No clinching proof of the allegations of any of these parties has been given.

3. The total available information tends to support the following conclusions:

- a. The attempt on Somoza's life was a genuine and spontaneous attack, made by Nicaraguan exiles living in Costa Rica, who entered Nicaragua with arms and for the purpose of mounting an attack against Somoza.
- b. The conspirators were tolerated in Costa Rica but apparently not directly supported by that government.
- c. The Guatemalan government had no demonstrable connection with the plan or the event.
- d. President Somoza apparently could have headed off the incident by intercepting the invading party at some time during the afternoon and evening of 3 April but did not make any effort to do so.

~~SECRET~~

*Annex #1*

~~SECRET~~

e. Somoza has inflated the importance and scope of the conspiracy and assassination attempt in press and public statements.

f. Somoza has sought to use the incident as a reason for charges against the governments of Costa Rica and Guatemala. He is still developing this case but so far has not produced convincing or clinching supporting evidence.

g. The question of Lieutenant Duarte's reasons for taking asylum in the Embassy of Guatemala is not yet solved and can possibly indicate Guatemalan implication unrevealed up to now.

h. There is no evidence of Communist direction of the incident.

~~SECRET~~

*Annex #1*

~~SECRET~~

ANNEX 2

4 May 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

*by WH Division*

SUBJECT: Nicaraguan Revolutionary Attempt, March-April 1954.

1. This memorandum is based on a necessarily extremely cursory examination of cables and other relevant documents thus far available. These include:

(a) Photostats of captured documents provided by Somoza, purporting to be plans of the conspirators. The photographing was done by [ ] personnel.

(b) A declaration by Humberto CHAMORRO to Nicaraguan officials regarding these events, in the preparation of which he played a part.

(c) [ ] 927 which reported an account by General CHAMORRO of his activities as leader of the attempt, as provided to [ ] by Ernesto SOLARZANO Thompson.

(d) Cable traffic based on information provided by President SOMOZA.

2. In answer to the questions posed this morning by [ ] a hasty examination of the above sources leads to the following tentative conclusions:

(a) There was a genuine, not a staged, revolutionary attempt of substantial proportions, to overthrow the Somoza government and, if the conspirators deemed it necessary, to assassinate Somoza.

(b) This attempt was under the aegis of General Emiliano CHAMORRO, inside Nicaragua, and Manuel GOMEZ Flores, who commanded forces based in Costa Rica. According to CHAMORRO, who is now in hiding, he plans to make a second attempt "in two months" from 7 April 1954.

(c) While there is no documentary proof as yet that this attempt was backed by either the Costa Rican or Guatemalan Governments, a closer examination will be necessary to determine, if possible, the degree of participation of natives of those two countries.

~~SECRET~~

*Annex # 2*



~~SECRET~~

2

(d) In the circumstances, it seems reasonable that Somoza should be much concerned and at the start should suspect Costa Rica and Guatemala of participating, but the fact that he admitted to [ ] on second <sup>thought</sup> ~~thoughts~~ that he lacked documentary proof is evidence tending to suggest that he is not blowing up the whole affair for US consumption.

3. The authenticity of the captured documents shown to and photographed by [ ] is verified by the following factors:

(a) There are no documents which show a definite tie-in with the Costa Rican and Guatemalan Governments. Any fabrication by Somoza would have been sure to include such "evidente."

(b) The complexity of the documentation, which includes detailed exposition of the seven stages of the revolutionary plan, extensive use of codes and cryptonyms, and apparently authentic memoranda between various members of the "Ejercito Revolucionario Nicaraguense", is evidence that a lot of thought went into the planning of the attempt and would have been hard to fabricate in the two or three days between the date of the attempt and the time they were photographed.

(c) Certain plans outlined in the documents agree with both the declaration of Humberto Chamorro to Nicaraguan authorities and the later report by Emiliano Chamorro, still in hiding, to [ ]

[ ]  
[ ]

~~SECRET~~

Annex # 2

~~SECRET~~

*Repared by OCT*

# EVIDENCE OF GUATEMALAN IMPLICATION IN THE NICARAGUAN PLOT

Evidence of Guatemalan participation in or foreknowledge of the attempted assassination of President Somoza is tenuous and circumstantial, despite the fact that Guatemalan government officials as well as Guatemalan Communists would almost certainly look with considerable sympathy upon any anti-Somoza movement. Relations between Nicaragua and Guatemala have been bad since 1946, and the Guatemalan government assisted the abortive efforts of Nicaraguan revolutionaries and the Caribbean Legion in 1948 and 1949. The Guatemalan attitude toward the Nicaraguan government has not appreciably changed since then, although formal diplomatic relations were reestablished between the two countries in 1951. The Guatemalan attitude toward Nicaragua probably hardened even more after the 29 January 1954 Guatemala "White Paper", which published alleged evidence that Nicaragua was implicated in a plot to overthrow the pro-Communist Guatemalan government. The following indications of possible Guatemalan participation cannot, however, be considered conclusive:

a. Somoza has told the American Ambassador on at least two occasions that the Guatemalan Ambassador in Nicaragua has engaged in anti-Somoza propaganda activities. The known activities of Guatemalan diplomatic missions in the other Central American countries tend to support this allegation, although there is no conclusive evidence. Somoza is not known to have claimed that the Guatemalan Ambassador was implicated in the present plot, however.

b. It may be significant that three of the plotters were granted diplomatic asylum in the Guatemalan Embassy in Managua, as two others were in the Costa Rican.

c. At least three of the 40-odd persons implicated in the plot had formerly lived in exile in Guatemala. These men (Jorge Rivas Montes, Honduran ex-Caribbean Legionnaire; and Col. Manuel Gomes Flores and Major Luis F. Gabuardi, ex-Nicaraguan National Guardsmen) were in Guatemala as late as August 1953, and Gabuardi had reached Costa Rica by January 1954. Rivas Montes stayed in exile in Guatemala for at least three years, prior to his fatal adventure in Nicaragua.

~~SECRET~~

*Annex #3*

~~SECRET~~

d. "Confessions" extracted from some of the would-be assassins alleged considerable Guatemalan implication in the plot. One such "confession" alleged that Presidents Arbenz and Figueres had planned the assassination attempt at a meeting in Mexico neither Arbenz or Figueres are known to have gone to Mexico at that time. Other "confessions" claim that Guatemalan planes were to be used in the later stages of the planned revolt. Some of those who "confessed" were later shot and at least one of the stories was obtained as the subject was dying. Somoza claimed to the American Ambassador, however, that at least one of those implicated is alive and ready to testify.

~~SECRET~~

*Encl # 3*

~~SECRET~~

*Repared by O*

## EVIDENCE OF COSTA RICAN IMPLICATION

1. It is possible that President Figueres granted clandestine assistance to the anti-Somoza coup, but no evidence firmly implicates him. Figueres, aggressive champion of democracy in Central America, has many close friendships among professional revolutionaries in the Caribbean area. When he led the 1948 revolt against the Communist-supported Calderon Guardia political machine in Costa Rica, he obtained important and perhaps decisive assistance from the Caribbean Legion. The Legion, an irregular military force composed of professional revolutionaries and political dissidents of many nationalities, emerged from the Costa Rican civil war with greater strength than the regular Costa Rican armed force. Figueres has been indebted to the Legion ever since. Although there is no evidence that the Legion attempted to influence Figueres in his conduct of the provisional Costa Rican Government in 1948 and 1949, it did embarrass him before hemisphere opinion by using Costa Rican territory for several abortive plots against Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. Figueres' hatred of the Caribbean dictatorships which the Legion aimed to overthrow, his sense of indebtedness to the Legion for its assistance in the civil war, and his close friendships with many Legionnaires, led him to be more tolerant of the Legion than his own or his country's interests warranted. It earned him the enmity of neighboring dictatorships which are unlikely ever to forget that he once backed a group intent on overthrowing them.

2. The OAS intervened in the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan crisis of 1949 and ordered both countries to withdraw support from elements hostile to neighboring governments. The Caribbean Legion is reported to have been disbanded shortly thereafter.

3. Figueres returned as the popularly-elected President of Costa Rica in November 1953. By January 1954 he was being troubled by renewed activity in Costa Rica of would-be revolutionaries intent on overthrowing neighboring dictatorships. On 21 January the Costa Rican Guardia Civil arrested several of the plotters and held them for violating Costa Rican laws by engaging in activity hostile to neighboring regimes. Costa Rican authorities, apparently unable to develop a strong case against them, released the plotters after a short imprisonment. Figueres reportedly obtained assurances from several of those implicated that they would not engage in further revolutionary activity. He is reliably reported to have informed Juan Bosch, Dominican exile and former Caribbean Legionnaire, that it was only because of their old friendship that he would permit him to leave the country with whatever equipment he had. Officials

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

in Costa Rica's Guardia Civil repeated that they would not permit Costa Rican territory to be used for activity aimed at the overthrow of neighboring governments. The investigative and secret police forces available to Costa Rica are very limited, however, and apparently the Figueres administration relied on the informal assurances of the plotters rather than effective official action to prevent a revival of revolutionary activity.